

Government gazettes compulsory testing notice

The Government exercises the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) and publishes in the Gazette a compulsory testing notice, which requires any person who had been present or stayed at 23 specified premises during the specified period (persons subject to compulsory testing) to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test.

In view of a preliminary positive local case involving mutant strain, 23 specified premises are included in the compulsory testing notice. The Government strongly reminds members of the public to strictly follow the compulsory testing requirements and undergo the multiple tests on time as required. The above compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well. They are advised to closely monitor their health conditions. They should seek medical attention and undergo testing even if they have only mild symptoms.

Persons subject to compulsory testing in accordance with a compulsory testing notice must go to any of the mobile specimen collection stations, community testing centres (CTCs) or recognised local medical testing institutions to undergo professional swab sampling in fulfilling the requirements for compulsory testing. Young children may continue to undergo the test using a stool specimen.

If Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above, the Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or the post-super typhoon "extreme conditions" announcement by the Government is in force at any time during the period for undergoing the compulsory testing, the period for undergoing the compulsory testing will be further extended for one day.

The Comirnaty and CoronaVac vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from COVID-19. They can provide protection to those vaccinated to prevent serious complications and even death after infection. The Government appeals to persons who are not yet vaccinated, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, to get vaccinated as soon as possible for better self-protection before the fifth wave strikes in Hong Kong.

Details of the compulsory testing notice are in Annex 1.

Subsequent to the announcement by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) on the updated quarantine arrangements of local COVID-19 cases with a mutant strain, persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on specified dates in accordance with the announcement by the Department of Health (DH). They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the

21st day (see the details of the buildings and dates of testing at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf). For prudence's sake, the above compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well.

In accordance with the compulsory testing notice issued earlier, all household members of close contacts are required to undergo compulsory testing. Any person who had lived with a person placed under quarantine pursuant to section 22 of the Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation (Cap. 599A) (person under quarantine) in the same residential unit on the date of commencement of quarantine or during the 14 days before that day, and who becomes aware of the quarantine of the person under quarantine when the relevant quarantine has not yet been completed, has to undergo testing within two days of him or her becoming aware that the person under quarantine has been placed under quarantine and report to the Government the result of the test by phone (6275 6901), fax (2530 5872) or email (ct@csb.gov.hk) within three days of undergoing the test. For prudence's sake, the above compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well.

CTCs provide testing services for the public, including free service for persons subject to compulsory testing. Booking and walk-in services are available. Members of the public only need to provide simple personal information on the 24-hour booking system (www.communitytest.gov.hk/en). The system shows the booking status of the centres for the coming two weeks to facilitate the public's planning and selection of a suitable testing centre and a time slot for testing. The testing centres will accord priority to serve individuals with advance bookings. As of 6pm today (December 23), there were around 33 000 booking places available for tomorrow (December 24) at the CTCs, and around 92 per cent availability for booking places for the coming seven days. Members of the public may call the testing centres for enquiries on the availability of bookings or walk-in quotas before visiting the centres.

Outdoor mobile specimen collection stations will be closed if Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or the Red Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force while all mobile specimen collection stations together with all CTCs will be closed when Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or higher or the Black Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force.

Free testing service will be provided to persons subject to compulsory testing at CTCs and mobile specimen collection stations located at 35 places in various districts tomorrow. The testing capacity should be sufficient to meet the demand. Persons subject to compulsory testing and those with the "LeaveHomeSafe" COVID-19 exposure notification or SMS notification from the CHP reminding them to undergo testing as soon as possible may receive free testing at CTCs or mobile specimen collection stations (if the service scope is applicable). The opening dates and operating hours of the mobile specimen collection stations are stated in Annex 2.

Persons subject to compulsory testing may choose to undergo testing via

the following routes:

1. To visit any of the mobile specimen collection stations (see the list and target groups (if applicable) at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html) for testing;
2. To attend any of the CTCs (see the list at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en);
3. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the DH and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results (see the list at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/List_of_recognised_laboratories_RTPCR.pdf), and the relevant sample must be taken through combined nasal and throat swabs; or
4. To use a specimen bottle distributed to the relevant specified premises by the CHP (if applicable), and return the specimen bottle with the stool sample collected as per relevant guidelines.

If a person subject to compulsory testing obtains a medical certificate issued by a registered medical practitioner, proving that he or she is unfit to undergo testing using a sample taken through combined nasal and throat swabs because of health reasons, then he or she may choose to undergo testing via the following routes by providing a deep throat saliva sample:

1. To obtain a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 121 post offices, vending machines set up at 20 MTR stations or 47 designated general out-patient clinics (GOPCs) of the Hospital Authority and return the specimen to one of the designated specimen collection points (see the distribution points and times, and the specimen collection points and times, at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html);
2. To undergo testing at any of the GOPCs of the Hospital Authority as instructed by a medical professional of the Hospital Authority; or
3. To self-arrange testing provided by private laboratories which are recognised by the DH and can issue SMS notifications in respect of test results.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau cautioned that testing received at the Accident and Emergency Departments of the Hospital Authority or during hospital stays, or testing provided by private laboratories which cannot issue SMS notifications in respect of test results, does not comply with the requirements of the aforementioned compulsory testing notice.

"If persons subject to compulsory testing have symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately and undergo testing as instructed by a medical professional. They should not attend the mobile specimen collection stations or the CTCs."

Persons subject to compulsory testing must keep the SMS notifications containing the result of the test and the relevant medical certificate (if applicable) for checking by a law enforcement officer when the officer requires the persons to provide information about their undergoing the specified test.

Furthermore, persons subject to testing under the compulsory testing notices should, as far as reasonably practicable, take appropriate personal

disease prevention measures including wearing a mask and maintaining hand hygiene, and, unless for the purpose of undergoing the specified test, stay at their place of residence and avoid going out until the test result is ascertained as far as possible.

Any enquiries on compulsory testing arrangements may be addressed to the hotline at 6275 6901, which operates daily from 9am to 6pm. If persons subject to compulsory testing plan to conduct testing at any of the CTCs, they can check the centre's appointment status in advance. The hotlines of the CTCs are available at www.communitytest.gov.hk/en/info.

The Government will continue to trace possibly infected persons who had been to the relevant premises, and seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). Collection and use of any personal data for conducting COVID-19 tests must meet the requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486). Government departments or testing service providers which handle the relevant information may provide the data to the DH or other relevant departments for anti-epidemic purposes as necessary. The workflow does not involve the provision of any personal data to organisations or persons outside Hong Kong.

The spokesman said, "The Government urges all individuals who are in doubt about their own health conditions, or individuals with infection risks (such as individuals who visited places with epidemic outbreaks or contacted confirmed cases), to undergo testing promptly for early identification of infected persons."

Scientific Committees under CHP update consensus interim recommendations on use of Comirnaty vaccine

The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases under the Centre for

Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (JSC) convened a meeting today (December 23), joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel (EAP), to discuss and update consensus interim recommendations on the use of Comirnaty vaccine in Hong Kong.

During the meeting, the JSC-EAP reviewed the latest situation of Omicron variant, studies of effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines against Omicron variant and overseas recommendations on use of COVID-19 vaccines. In view of the latest global Omicron situation, the JSC-EAP recommends individuals who are not vaccinated to receive vaccination as soon as possible to protect from severe illnesses and complications. For individuals aged 18 years and above who had received two doses of Comirnaty or CoronaVac vaccine, a third dose of Comirnaty vaccine is strongly recommended while this dose is recommended to be administered as soon as possible six months after the second dose. Individuals with personal needs (e.g. travel to overseas countries) can receive this dose earlier but not less than three months after the previous dose. Nevertheless, personal choice for the vaccines is respected.

The experts also recommended pregnant and lactating women to receive the mRNA vaccines, including a third dose, with the same administration arrangements as for the general adult population. For persons with previous infection, a second dose of Comirnaty vaccine at six months after the first dose is recommended.

The use of Comirnaty vaccine for children and adolescents aged 12 to 17, previously recommended to receive one dose instead of two doses in September this year, was revisited by the JSC-EAP. Emerging data suggest that two doses of Comirnaty vaccine with a longer interval would result in better immune response as well as lowering the risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis when compared with a shorter interval. In view of the emergence of the Omicron variant, the JSC-EAP recommended persons aged 12 to 17 years to receive the second dose of the Comirnaty vaccine at least 12 weeks after the first dose of Comirnaty vaccine. The JSC-EAP also recommended intramuscular injection of the Comirnaty vaccine at mid-anterolateral thigh, especially for male children and male adolescents.

Details of the interim recommendations are available at the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/static/24008.html).

[New Territories West Cluster announces a visitor tested preliminarily positive for COVID-19](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for the New Territories West Cluster (NTWC) made the following announcement today (December 23) regarding a visitor tested preliminarily positive for COVID-19:

The NTWC received notification from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health that a 64-year-old male who underwent COVID-19 testing yesterday (December 22) was tested preliminarily positive and was suspected to be involving Omicron mutant strain. The male attended consultation at Tuen Mun Wu Hong Clinic in the morning on December 13, and he also accompanied another person to the Specialist-Out-Patient Clinic of the Department of Oncology in Tuen Mun Hospital in the morning of December 17 and 20. He had been wearing surgical mask all along.

Upon learning the test result of the visitor, hospital infection control team has immediately conducted contact tracing. Around 100 staff members have to undergo testing. All staff members have been wearing masks during work and therefore no staff member was identified as close contact. Also, thorough cleansing and disinfection at areas that the patient visited will be conducted. The NTWC will continue to closely monitor the health condition of staff members and communicate with the CHP on the latest situation.

AFCD mounts wild pig capture operation at Kotewall Road in Central and Western District

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) mounted a wild pig capture operation at Kotewall Road in Central and Western District today (December 23) with a view to reducing the number of wild pigs there and safeguarding public safety.

An AFCD spokesman said that the department started the wild pig capture operation at Kotewall Road at 6pm this evening. Veterinarians used dart guns to capture five wild pigs for humane dispatch through medicine injection. The operation was completed at 8.30pm.

The AFCD will continue to carry out wild pig capture operations and accord priority to sites with multiple numbers of wild pigs, areas with a history of injury cases or areas where wild pigs may pose risks to members of the public.

CHP investigates COVID-19 preliminary positive case involving mutant strain at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court in Tuen Mun

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 23) said that it is investigating a preliminary positive imported-related case of COVID-19 involving a mutant strain.

The case involves a 64-year-old male patient living at On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun. He is a toilet cleaner working at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). The patient received two doses of COVID-19 vaccination on July 10 and August 10 (CoronaVac) in Hong Kong. According to his job nature, he has to undergo frequent regular COVID-19 testing and he tested negative in 10 tests during December 2 to 20. His specimen collected yesterday (December 22) in the mobile specimen collection station at HKIA tested preliminarily positive with a Ct value about 27 to 32. He developed symptoms on the same day. Testing by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch revealed that the spike protein gene of the patient's sample involves N501Y and T478K mutations (negative for the L452R and E484K strains), hence the CHP suspects at this stage that the patient carries the Omicron variant, but a whole genome sequencing still needs to be conducted to confirm whether the patient carries the Omicron variant.

A preliminary investigation revealed that he has no recent travel history and he mainly performed cleaning and disinfection work at a designated toilet solely for use by preliminary positive imported cases confined at a designated area at the Midfield Concourse of HKIA while waiting for transfer to hospital. He last went to work on December 22. He had stayed inside the storeroom situated inside the toilet during work and had been in the toilet with preliminary positive cases at the same time. The CHP has conducted a site visit at HKIA today and collected 26 environmental samples at the storeroom, a changing room and a restroom used by the patient with the test results pending.

A preliminary investigation showed that the patient has likely acquired the infection during his work at the toilet for preliminary positive cases. In view of the relatively high Ct value and multiple negative tests in the past 21 days, the case was likely detected at a very early stage of infection by regular testing.

The CHP has advised the Airport Authority Hong Kong and the contractor concerned that the cleaners should only perform cleaning and disinfection work after the preliminary positive cases have left the toilet after use, and the cleaners should not stay inside the storeroom in toilet when they are not performing work.

As the patient carries a mutant strain with higher transmissibility and risk of infection, the Government has made a "restriction-testing declaration" tonight for the building where the patient resided in Hong Kong (On Hei House, Siu Hei Court, Tuen Mun) and persons who resided or worked at the building will be subject to increased compulsory testing frequency. The places where he had visited in Hong Kong during the incubation period will also be included in a compulsory testing notice. Specified persons who were present at the relevant venues at specified periods need to undergo compulsory testing on the specified date. An epidemiological investigation and contact tracing of the case will continue.

The spokesman for the CHP said, "The Government has remained vigilant and has been closely monitoring the latest scientific data on mutant strains as well as the epidemic situation of various places. The most stringent anti-epidemic measures will be implemented to prevent the mutant strain from spreading in the local community."

At the moment, the adverse impact on the epidemic situation caused by the newly emerged mutant strains is not fully known yet, but vaccination is still essential to prevent severe cases and deaths from COVID-19 infection. The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).